

BLEEDING RED: DECOLONIZING THE ACTOR'S
PROCESS IN SEARCH OF EMOTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract:

“Bleeding Red: Decolonizing the Actor's Process in Search of Emotional Authenticity”

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The contents of this thesis will discuss the search for emotional authenticity and vulnerability in performance through an investigation of my Indigenous identity and decolonization. Through the role of Maybe Jane and ensemble member in the adaptation of Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I intend to explore indigenizing my role and process to access my full range of emotion, ultimately, allowing a non-Indigenous story and character to be expressed through my Indigenous body. Using Yvette Nolan's *Medicine Shows: Indigenous Performance Culture*, and the works of many Indigenous scholars, as my source material I will further examine how the practices of the Indigenous performance community can be incorporated into non-Indigenous, multi-cultural theatre processes. This investigation will be aided through the examining of the life and works of original author Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, the roles and status of women at the turn of the 20th century, my summer research working in Indigenous pedagogies, and personal investigation of my own indigeneity.

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Summer Research Paper:

In order to grow as an artist, seeking vulnerability and authenticity in my performances, inside and outside of the studio, and deepen my work I must decolonize my training, worldview, and mind.

Recently, I realized that all of the perceived negative aspects of being Indigenous (or, rather, the ones that are associated with being Indigenous) are not, in fact, qualities of indigeneity but rather the sickly symptoms of colonialism. In Wayne Warry's book *Ending Denial: Understanding Aboriginal Issues* he links this negativity and my own warped perception of Indigenous peoples to historical traumas, specifically those traumas suffered by many in residential schools.

Aboriginal identity has historically been defined by the state ...The residential school system was a direct assault on this identity; indeed, educational practices were strategically honed to strip away Aboriginal identity and replace it with a European one. As a result many, not all, who attended residential schools lost a sense of themselves ... Warry 102.

Throughout my life I have internalized a great deal of racism towards Indigenous peoples. From an early age I was able to decipher that everything “normal”, “successful”, and “clean” was white. I grew up in a beautiful, progressive, and predominantly white neighbourhood. I went to the coveted public school of the area, where everyone I was surrounded by was touched by privilege, including myself. However, my family was not wealthy and money was often the source of tension and frustration in my home. I was acutely aware of what I did not have growing up surrounded by the “standard” of white upper-middle class living: mini vans, vacation packages, clean immaculate houses, happiness. Despite my awareness of how little I had in comparison to my classmates and their families, I always had food to eat, clothes, and two parents who showed me love and support. I also had Grandparents who provided me with much love and support. With their support, as well as the support of my other privileged relatives of mine I was able to enjoy most of the experiences that my classmates were afforded. I went to horse-back riding camp; I went on exchange to Italy; I took expensive screen acting

classes. I had a wicked support system and an environment that fostered all of my creative talents. I was not only enriched by these experiences but by ideals of living and possibility. No one ever said to me that some things might be out of reach because of who and what I am. However, I did remember something jarring. I think back on memories of my father's family, my white family, and reflect so warmly over family photos, dinners around big country tables with adults laughing and chatting away, watching us children play. I also have memories of my mother's family. I remember the first time that I went to visit my relatives and my mother's reservation of Pukatawagan. No one's house was clean, I remember hearing my relatives yell at one another, I remember mattresses on the floor and having to share everything, there was hardly any adult supervision. I was not able to depend on, or, look up to the adults in the room. Now, I realize now how much these experiences have influenced my own view and values towards my community and towards my notions of indigeneity. Everyone in my upbringing who provided me with intellectually stimulating experiences and consistency were from my white family, whereas, memories of my Indigenous family were much darker and did not live up to the “standard” of living that I had observed in the lives of my classmates and white family.

Culture imbues personality with specific traits and has important psychological benefits. When the relationship between culture and identity is disturbed or is called into question, the result can be personal disorientation that can have serious emotional and psychological consequences for individuals ... Warry 102.

Over the summer term of my Master's research, I've realized that a large part of my time has been dedicated to confronting my own prejudices and the level of internalized racism towards my peoples and myself. Over the past few months I have had the privilege to work with many Indigenous artists, witness their work, participate, learn, and explore our issues from a uniquely Indigenous perspective. This has created a perfect environment to explore my own indigeneity and challenge myself to confront the internal conflict I am beginning to uncover. This has been difficult to reconcile as I attempt to

explore the act of decolonizing my training and to understand what my identity means to my work as an actor and my growth as a young artist. In her book *Medicine Shows* Yvette Nolan explains the link between theatre artists, storytelling, and medicine.

Indigenous theatre artists make medicine by reconnecting through ceremony, through the act of remembering, through building community, and by negotiating solidarities across communities. The acting of staging these things reconnects who we are as Indigenous people with where we have come from, with our stories, with our ancestors. The things we know and the values we hold that are manifest in the contemporary work that we put upon the stage make Indigenous artists the conduit between the past and the future. Nolan 3.

This is how I am approaching my thesis and my training in the fall of 2016, as an act of creating medicine for myself. It has taken my whole life up until this point to understand what all of this means and to begin unpacking it in order to decolonize my own mind.

My experiences working within Indigenous pedagogies this summer have illuminated for me some core values that I have yet to experience in my Western actor training. The first thing that became apparent, when attempting to compare the two pedagogies, was the difference of the relationship between teacher and student. I participated in the Kaha:wi Summer Dance Intensive for a week long session exploring various incarnations of Indigenous dance as well as the Eastern movement practice of Butoh. On the first day it was hard to distinguish between student and teacher as everyone was collectively participating in each class. Some one would emerge from the larger group of movers and begin to take the rest of the group through the work. There was no formal or imposed lines drawn between the knowledge givers and receivers. I was also coming into a group that had already had a week prior to become familiar with one another but as we went around the circle and introduced the newcomers I had no way of knowing who was “in charge”, nobody proclaiming themselves to be the

“leader” of the group or the work. This is significant to me because in so much of my experience within the Western actor training model, specifically within the conservatory model of actor training, the hierarchy of knowledge is steep, and explicitly defined. There has always been some one who addresses the group directly, defines the expectations and purposes behind the class or project, and thus situates themselves in a position of authority. The benefit of working *with* those from whom I was also learning is that it was a great equalizer. One person had their specific knowledge to share but was also willing to embrace the state of unknowing when exploring another's style of work. There was no “total expert” in anything at all, even though, of course, each teacher had precise skills and deep knowledge that was demonstrated through their execution and explanation of their work. How this benefited my work was immense, I felt a kinship with the collective so quickly and it allowed me to feel free from scrutiny or pressure to perform well. This, in turn, inspired me to take larger risks and instilled in me an inhibition in my attempt to execute moves and try new things. This is significant because I approached this workshop as a non-dancer. This summer intensive is intended specifically for dancers. Even on their website there is a disclaimer that informs those interested that they must have a certain level of experience to simply keep up with the work being taught. This was intimidating as some one who has had a breadth of movement training but never a rigorous, long-term, focused form from which to build. I was humbled by their gracious offer to invite me.

The experience also brought me to a major revelation about learning in both pedagogies; the significance of language. There is a phrase in particular I make reference to, one that I came to know working with a teacher in my Western actor training. It was a metaphor for capability and range. The phrase, “to have enough tools in your kitchen”, was used as means of distinguishing one student's skill level from another in regards to the technique we were all collectively learning, and all new to, at the time. Some had more, some had less “tools”, which translated to physical skill in the context of this

class. This notion confounded me as a performer, I simply did not understand the intent behind that phrasing. I understood that every performer had come with a unique background of styles, skills, and knowledge, but I never viewed these differences as lacking on some one else's (or my own) part. There was an unmistakable negative connotation to the phrase. A student would be made an example of having “*more tools*” in their kitchen when it was obvious they had formal dance training. This meant they were more capable and could achieve more in the work. By making that formal distinction, I immediately interpreted my lack of formal dance training as having “less tools” and was discouraged. This coloured my whole experience of the class and the work and, ultimately, made me feel uncertain and below average no matter what we did. With this phrase floating around my mind as a student, I was always left questioning whether I had “enough tools” in my kitchen. That language bothered me greatly for the negative impact it had on my work. Now coming into this dance theatre workshop with this phrase still lingering in my mind I, nonetheless, dove in. In a room full of professional and life-long dancers from around the world, I was never made to feel like I did not “have enough tools” in my kitchen. I received constant encouragement during that workshop. There were, of course, moments where it was obvious I could not execute a move in the same way that some of my peers could but for every challenge came a solution and that encouragement I received from my teachers and peers gave me the drive to push myself further and own my skill level. The company's statement on the Summer Intensive iterates the values with which the company operates and teaches.

The program supports process and discovery through activation and transformation of body, mind and space. KDT SI [Kaha:wi Summer Intensive] offers practical and philosophical tools for developing artists and artists who are focused on working from an embodied Indigenous knowledge base. Training methods include: world Indigenous dance and performance, contemporary techniques, physical training systems, performance training and artistic dialogue.

Support, process, developing, practical and philosophical, one major thing that I notice is the continuum, flow, and active nature of those words as I look into my *Graduate Program in Theatre Handbook* and the word that stands out is “problem”. Perhaps, I cannot help but see that word but as I continue to unravel and attempt to understand the significance of language in my journey through this thesis that I find it crucial to pay special attention to the language I choose to surround my work. This will help me in reshaping my own performance vernacular as I begin to indigenize my actor process. Working on my artistic challenge, seeking vulnerability and authenticity in my performances and in studio work, has brought me to the glaringly obvious realization that I find it much easier to connect with works that address Indigenous issues or come from my own personal collection of stories, poetry, and art. That is not to say that I am always more interested in Indigenous stories, plays, or narratives, but that I find that the emotions and connections to that work are never hard to find. It is as if there is an express lane from my mind to my heart when consuming or participating in this kind of content, specifically, in reference to residential school, of which both of my Grandparents survived.

The exploration of the residential school system by Indigenous artists has been a slow and often painful process of education for a Canadian public that was largely oblivious to its existence.

The art has created opportunities to learn about its history and begin to understand its impact on Indigenous communities. Nolan 14.

When I saw Kevin Loring's *Where the Blood Mixes* in the fall of 2012, as third year undergraduate acting student, it was a more significant than I could have ever foreseen. It was the first time in the theatre that I saw myself represented on stage and, until I saw it, I did not even realize that I had never felt truly represented on stage. It was a revolutionary moment for myself as a performer and Indigenous woman. I wept during the show and afterwards, I have a distinct memory of attempting to explain my feelings to the cast during the talkback after the performance but was unable to contain my emotions or clearly express what I had experienced. It was then I realized the importance of telling Indigenous

stories. This revelation is still so fresh in my mind as it was only three years ago that it took place. I am still in my infancy of understanding the significance of unearthing Indigenous stories for the stage. For myself, understanding and participating in Indigenous pedagogies has been crucial to this continued unearthing. Working over the summer with the dance theatre company Signal Theatre was another opportunity to exist and operate within an Indigenous and intercultural pedagogy, this time not exclusively as a student but as a collaborator and performer. Once again, with Indigenous content, I did not find it difficult to tap into deep emotion and formed an immediate connection to the work. I also found the structure of the company highly collaborative, with individuals often coming with their own offerings for scenes and movements, as well as many discussions of content and purpose.

In the long run, policies of indigenization, rather than encouraging Aboriginal participation in mainstream institutions, have afforded Aboriginal peoples the opportunity to develop culturally appropriate institutions. Warray 36.

I found Signal Theatre to be a culturally diverse and “appropriate” ensemble, a great intersection where people from many backgrounds could come and discuss our relationships to one another and to this land we call home, with Indigenous voices at the helm. I found my time working with Signal Theatre to be empowering because I was thrust into a situation where I was looked to for input and perspective, I felt that there was a need for my voice in the room. This was a space that was eager to listen to my knowledge, my stories, my thoughts on our subject matter and, for the first time, I felt my indigeneity, my instinct, and my intellect were converging and allowing my authentic experience to be shared without filter or apprehension.

Control over issues of personal and cultural identity— essentially the right to say who you are — is one of the most critical aspects of self-determination. Our sense of self and feelings of personal worth are linked to how we think about and experience our culture ... no culture has been more savagely attacked with discriminatory practices, stereotypes, and policies of

assimilation for a sustained period of time than Aboriginal cultures worldwide. The burden of this colonial history is deeply felt in Aboriginal people's identity in Canada today. Warry 102.

Though it was empowering to speak on these subjects and be able to provide insight, I continue to struggle with, as Warry puts it, the burden of this colonial history as it relates to my artistic identity. Much of this struggle has to do with my own privilege and feelings of inauthenticity when it comes to my Indigenous identity as I often feel like a “fraud.” My greatest fear on this journey is to be rejected by the same community I am attempting to immerse myself in and call my own. I simply do not represent the reality of many Indigenous peoples across the nation. This goes back to my very first discovery about my personal prejudices towards Indigenous peoples and my place within colonial thinking. “The Indigenous intellectual's place in the dominant culture will always be problematic because virtually every aspect of Indigenous life remains steeped in colonialism.” (Turner 105). In Dale Turner's book *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* he describes the paradoxical struggle of decolonization. It seems counter intuitive to attempt to decolonize my training as an actor when I am not only bound by my own colonial frame but am also working within the Western model of academia at York University. However paradoxical, it is my belief that through performance I will find the vulnerability and authenticity I seek by decolonizing my practice as an actor and that these Western structures that I am obliged to traverse will inform me of what aspects of these systems are useful to me and what elements exist in opposition to my development.

However it has become apparent that Aboriginal people, rather than *adopting* Western practices and ideas, were *adapting* them to suit their own cultural purposes. This distinction is critically important and greatly misunderstood in mainstream discourse ...When children were trained in Western educational institutions, including Residential Schools, it did not necessarily lead them to embrace mainstream values ... How Aboriginal peoples resisted the influence of the dominant society, and how their culture was sustained; participation in the dominant society, or even

acceptance of European values, did not necessarily imply that assimilation had occurred. Warry 35.

I desire, through developing my thesis, to find my authentic voice, like the one I experienced working with Signal Theatre, a voice where my knowledge from both Western and Indigenous practices can come together. I am interested in how decolonization can take place within this academic framework, where it helps and hinders my process, and how this reconnection to my Indigenous identity will translate on the stage. “I sometimes speak of Aboriginal peoples as being fluently bicultural: they are capable of understanding their own cultural ways as well as the rules of mainstream society” (Warry 106). I feel, however, that my efforts will be in vain if I am not actively *doing* anything to create medicine, not only for myself, but for others, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. “I am frequently reminded of the Coeur D’Alene writer Sherman Alexie’s dictum that Indigenous artists do not have the luxury of just making art” (qtd. in Nolan 111). Embracing my indigeneity and decolonizing my process in search of emotional authenticity in performance means that I am cementing the relationship between my art and my identity. Each will be inspiring the other in continuum and will create a foundation for my deepest emotional work as a performer. It is my hope that I will be able to fuse these two different ways of knowing, Western and Indigenous, in order to connect to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences with vulnerability and total transparency.

From the beginning of this process I was fascinated with my inherit political nature. I am a young, Indigenous, woman, and my very presence within this academic institution is a political act. I am a non-Western body existing and thriving in an institution built upon imposed Western values on Indigenous lands. I am reminded of the play *Tombs of the Vanishing Indians*, by Marie Clements and the character Jessie, in particular. Jessie is a medical doctor who is haunted by the memory of her sisters as they were separated at a young age. Towards the end of the play, her partner, a white male

doctor, explains to her that she is the “best of both worlds”, meaning Indigenous and Western, because of the advantages she has had being adopted by a white family (Clements, 57). She responds, “How can I be the best of both worlds when I can't even find my sisters...” (Clements, 57). My connection to this passage comes from my own sense of lacking, of inauthenticity because of a failure to unearth my roots. My goal is that, by reconnecting to those roots, I will be able to retrieve one more piece of my most authentic self and that that will allow me to share with an audience. This summer I was fortunate enough to visit the ancestral lands of my family, a place where several of my relations still live and work along the Churchill River. I embarked on this journey with my mother, grandmother, aunt, and younger cousin, to reconnect with the land and engage in our cultural, family practices. My journey there came from my desire to connect to my roots, my traditions, and my family. I spent the week listening to stories from my relatives, smoking fish, picking blueberries, and living off the land. Throughout my time there I reflected on all of my internalized prejudices and witnessed the incredible beauty of the land and the great welcoming, land-based knowledge, and exceptional spirit that my relatives possessed. This was a different kind of knowledge, tactile, sometimes ancient, and totally kinesthetic. It was a privilege to participate in these activities and to be surrounded by a place and peoples that were inextricably a part of my ancestry, my family, of me. It was a reminder of where I have come from and the peoples I come from. I was gifted a vast amount of traditional knowledge, knowledge that exists beyond citation. This journey was the final portion of my summer research. Like my time with Kaha:wi and Signal Theatre, I felt my value and was able to realize my place within a larger Indigenous community. It was a time that compelled me to share my stories, songs, and Cree language. I hope to bring these stories into my new school year, specifically with my work in Professor Erika Batdorf's Solo Creation Class.

In conclusion, my summer research has brought much insight into my thesis journey and I am excited

to continue my work into my final semesters. It was my goal to build a foundation of Indigenous knowledge over the summer so that I could go back to school with experiential knowledge and carry that discernment and perspective through my last semester of classes. I believe that I have done so and am excited to put into practice what I have set out for myself here as I continue my work, researching my role, and through classroom explorations. As I continue to investigate the process of decolonization as it relates to my acting work I am eager to know how I will receive new information and interact with this institution in the coming months.

For people who have refused to disappear in spite of hundreds of years of occupation, refused to be assimilated in spite of an active policy to take away their languages, traditional lands, and cultural practices, the telling of these stories and speaking of these languages in public is a political act, an act of resistance. Even when we tell other stories, stories about ceremony, about making community, or about transformation, those stories are built on the joyful, painful primary assertion that, in spite of everything, we are still here. Nolan 31.

In the coming months and through my role in *The Yellow Wallpaper* it is my hope that I will be able to express a similar assertion that I have arrived.

About the Author:

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), author of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, published many books, articles, and works of fiction throughout her life. As well as her fictional literature she published many non-fiction books including, *Women and Economics (1898)*, *Home: Its Work and Influence (1903)*, and *The Man Made World (1911)*. Her works centred predominantly around women in society and sought to challenge the status quo of the prescribed roles of men and women, specifically domestic roles centred around the home.

In all this long period of progress the moving world has carried with it the unmoving home; the man free and the woman confined; the man specializing in a thousand industries, the woman still limited to her domestic functions. We have constantly believed that this was the true way to live, the natural way, the only way. Whatever else might change —and all things did— the home must not. So sure we are, and are we yet, of this, that we have utterly refused to admit that the home has changed, has grown, has improved, in spite of our unshaken convictions and unbending opposition. Perkins-Gilman 6.

This passage from Gilman's 1903 book, *Home: Its Work and Influence*, provides insight to her stance on the state of imbalance between men and women at that time, placing women below men in the hierarchy of the world, both inside and outside of the home. Her 1892 short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper* reflects similar themes and Gilman's own experience, described as "...a fictionalized account of a woman's descent into madness, was based on her own experience of a deteriorating marriage and her resulting mental breakdown" (Radcliff Institute 2016). Gilman's first marriage was to visual artist Charles Walter Stetson with whom she had only one child, named Katherine. Stetson and Gilman divorced, which was at the time a great taboo, Gilman headed west with her daughter, to Pasadena, California where she began working as a writer and lecturer (Radcliff Institute 2016). Eventually, Gilman sent her daughter back east to live with her former husband and his new spouse, and good

friend, Grace Channing. She married a second time to her first cousin George Houghston Gilman who was an attorney in New York (Allen 14). This marriage would last thirty-four years. Her politics and personal life drew widespread criticism at the time but she is remembered for her contributions to the women's rights movement of the early 20th century and feminism. Gilman herself was subjected to the same 'rest cure' as her central character in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, administered by physician Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, who treated many educated women of the day (Allen 23). Gilman died in 1935 by suicide, suffering from the effects of a breast cancer diagnosis 3 years previous. Her suicide note and final article was published in *Forum* shortly after her passing, the piece was entitled "The Right to Die". She hoped that the publication of this article would spark public debate on the subject of a person's right to determine their fate when confronted with the long suffering of terminal illness (Allen 325). Truly, Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived her life full of revolutionary thoughts and ideas that she was determined to express up until the very end of her life. She died on August 17th, 1935.

Short Story, Adaptations, and Production History:

The Yellow Wallpaper by Charlotte Perkins Gilman was first published in 1892 in *The New England Magazine*. Since its first publication it has grown in popularity to become a significant piece of literature within American literary criticism (Allen 7). *The Yellow Wallpaper* has been adapted for both the screen and stage. The first known adaptation was for the screen in the 1977 short film by the same name, directed by Marie Ashton with the script adapted by Julie Ashton. The short film starred American actress Sigrid Wurschmidt (IMDb 2016). The era of the film's release coincides with a burst in Gilman's popularity from the mid-seventies, with frequent republication during that time, in the midst of a revitalized new wave of feminism (Allen 7).

In 2003, playwright Heather Newman adapted *The Yellow Wallpaper* into a full-length play of the

same name. It was produced in Seattle that year at Theatre Shmeater where it won “Best of the Fringe” at the city's annual Fringe Festival and was produced again a few years later, in 2005, directed by Doctor Judith Gallagher at Terrant County College. This particular adaptation has a cast of four women and two men with the original production featuring Mary Jane Gibson in the lead role, named Charlotte (CreativeMaven 2016). Earlier this year, in March of 2016, another adaptation of the story by Sue Mach was produced in association with theatre artist Grace Carter and CoHo productions of Portland, Oregon. Departing from a more traditional text the production combined “expressionistic audio, visual and movement” as well as the text from the original short story and personal journals of Gilman herself drawing the parallel of her real life experience to that of her fictional character. The 2000's too now seem to be rife with productions, adaptations, and performances of *The Yellow Wallpaper* including two consecutive film productions, both with the original title; another short film released in 2011 with screenplay by Stuart Hackshaw, and a feature length film adapted by Aric Cushing and starring actress Juliet Landau (IMDb 2016). It would seem that, over time, the writing of Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, and more specifically, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, has only grown and has secured its significance within American feminist literature.

Text, Context, Women's Roles:

The lives of women at the turn of the 20th century were full of many hardships, restrictions, and rules. This is the period when Gilman lived and is the time that *The Yellow Wallpaper* is set. Gilman wrote extensively about the roles and status of women in society in this time illuminating some of the pressures that existed,

Since we first began to force upon our girl baby's astonished and resisting brain the fact that she was a girl; since we curbed her liberty by clothing and ornament only to emphasize the fact of sex, and by restrictions of decorum based upon the same precocious distinction, we have never

relaxed the pressure...we diligently strove to enforce and increase her femininity...So by the time her womanhood does come it finds every encouragement, and the humanhood which should predominate we have restricted and forbidden. Perkins Gilman 258-9.

Women of the time were, from birth, given no control over any aspect of their lives. From their clothing, to their sexuality, and destiny, women were trapped in a world that demanded that they fall in line with what it meant to be feminine and a woman. The main roles thrust upon women of this day were that of wife and mother. This is directly reflected in *The Yellow Wallpaper* where we find the narrator literally trapped, in a children's nursery, every moment of her day controlled by a man, her husband, John, also a physician.

Gilman underscores the identity of the protagonist as wife-mother...by placing her in a room that was formerly a nursery, however, with barred windows so that she cannot escape. The conflation of the roles of child and mother occurs as the narrator keeps her focus entirely on the enclosing walls of the sinister room. An infant would not be able to leave its nursery; neither is the mother... Wagner-Martin 54.

The metaphor of the narrator's literal confinement mirrors the social and political reality of women living in that time. Trapped by the walls of the room, a room meant for children, Gilman shows us how often women were treated as weak, naive, and infantile. "To show the metamorphosis of the wife into John's child, Gilman makes her more and more child-like. John calls her 'a blessed little goose' as he hugs her, 'takes all care from her', and laughs at her fears. She, accordingly and in response, remembers being afraid as a child in a dark room..." (Wagner-Martin 57). This theme of women's confinement, to their roles, to the home, was the subject of Gilman's 1903 book *Home: Its Work and Influence*. She raises the important issue, little discussed at the time, of women's mental vitality living under such conditions.

What do we find bestowed upon her by the ceaseless, enclosing presence of the house? How

does staying in one's own house all one's life affect the mind?...The first result is a sort of mental myopia. Looking always at things too near, the lens expands, the focus shortens, the objects within range are all too large...This is a general sweeping consequence of being house-bound; and it is a heavily opposing influence to all human progress. Perkins Gilman 215-16.

Gilman asserts that, when women's worlds are so small, their minds, too, become small and that this, ultimately, slows down humankind's evolution because a significant portion of the population are only utilizing a fraction of their capacity as intelligent creatures. Gilman's notion, that when women are given little to do and no where to go those things that appear domestic or simple suddenly become massive and exaggerated, is present in her writing of *Wallpaper*. "Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress, to entertain, to order things" (Perkins Gilman 649). Due to the narrator's "nervous condition" as she names it, her duties are even further restricted and condemned, "...and [I] am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again" (Perkins Gilman 648). By being told that she is only allowed to perform certain tasks and the implication that "work" of any kind would hinder her recovery, naturally, she internalizes these ideas and comes to accept them as fact. There are times, however, when she does confess to disagreeing with her husband but she says he is, after all, "a physician of high standing" and therefore must know better and have her best interests at heart. Truly, it would be hard to argue your case against some one who has medical science as their defence but his treatment of her further suppresses any objection on her part. "Three of the paragraphs from the first page open with the husbands name, 'John', and describe him in the act of either laughing at her, losing patience with her, or identifying himself as a physician, a tactic he choses frequently to end arguments with his wife" (Wagner-Martin 54). Again, the narrator's husband infantilizes her, placing himself well above her, thus diminishing and invalidating her thoughts and feelings. Simultaneously, while so much attention is paid to her "recovery" he continually plays down the whole experience of her condition, "He [her husband John] has also told her repeatedly that hers is *not* a serious case and Gilman suggests

that she believes his words: his language tends to replace hers in the text from this point on” (Wagner-Martin 56). So, she is told that she is unwell, that she must limit her activity in order to “recover” (a task that renders her incapable of most things) but is constantly told that this condition of hers, one that consumes her whole life, is not serious at all. It is no wonder then that so many women of the time suffered from mental illnesses living in a world that flatly refused to validate the majority of their experiences, contradicting them at every turn,

...[T]he high rate of increase in female insanity during the Victorian period [is] 'one of history's self-fulfilling prophecies. In a society that not only perceived women as child-like, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal. Moreover, the medical belief that the instability of the female nervous and reproductive systems made women more vulnerable to derangement than men had extensive consequences for social policy. It was used as a reason to keep women out of the professions, to deny them political rights, and to keep them under male control in the family and the state. Wagner-Martin 56.

It can be said that for women living in this time, as is the case for our narrator, there was no way out. Gilman makes this clear in the text as the narrator begins to descend into madness. With no where to go, no one to relate to, nothing to satisfy her or give her purpose, she begins to venture deeper into her own mind, deeper into insanity, to escape the real world that keeps her completely imprisoned. For, at least, in madness there is a freedom that she is unable to express in the world she is oppressed by, but even in madness there is no true escape. “The contrary movement of the story, towards freedom from that oppression, does dominate...but it [too] takes the protagonist into only a false freedom. The woman is never 'free'...” (Wagner-Martin 61).

Thesis Role and Research in Process:

In Matthew Earnest's adaptation of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, our ensemble of women portray all of the characters that include, the narrator Maybe Jane, her husband John, his sister Jennie, and a variety of other characters that appear in this adaptation such as nurses, doctors, her baby, etc. So, as I engage with my work on my thesis role as Maybe Jane in this adaptation of Charlotte Gilman Perkins *The Yellow Wallpaper*, I begin by drawing parallels between my character's reality, her lack of agency, her confinement, and the psychological repercussions of her treatment, with the historical reality of Indigenous peoples, including myself and my family. Firstly, what I find compelling is the devastating effects of patriarchy on my character's circumstances. At the time that the original piece was written, and in the time/place of our adaptation, Maybe Jane is viewed as inferior, weak, and unwell, thereby rendering her ability to express her wishes and hold any decision as to her own quality of life invalid. As an Indigenous performer embodying this role, I cannot help but liken this experience of perceived and legal inferiority to the experience of Indigenous peoples, in particular Indigenous women, at the hands of the European settlers who brought with them the same patriarchal ideas, values, and beliefs.

Eurocentric patriarchal thinking sends a different message. In Europe and later Canada, women were regarded as the property of men and were not recognized politically or legally as persons until the early twentieth century. Today, our people live in confusion...patriarchal power is legitimized, despite decades of liberal feminist activism. We often mimic these behaviours...Yet, because we have not completely lost our old ways, this all leads to a clash of colonial and Indigenous worldviews. Ogilvie 2012.

The importance of acknowledging and drawing upon this knowledge in my acting work, specifically in this role, stems from my desire to reckon with this history, and how it lives in my body and mind, in order to access that inherited, authentic experience and share it with an audience.

The terms *reckoning* and *sharing* lead me back to my practice of mindfulness as discussed by Yellow Bird which, “refers to being deeply aware of what is happening from moment to moment, outside and inside of us, without judging or attaching to the content, feelings, and emotions that arise. It refers to living deeply and richly in the present...” (Yellow Bird 67). This mindfulness has become a crucial part of my creative process; for what has come along with my recalling of Indigenous history, and my place within that history, is the traumatic effects of colonialism. These traumas of Indigenous history and colonialism in Canada ripple through every aspect of contemporary Indigenous identity, “Since contact, the colonial gaze upon the Indigenous body has been our inherited collective self-perception. As a society, we have collectively ingested this perception, and whether we like it or not, it has knit itself into how we see ourselves and how others see us” (Olson 278). So, to be mindful in my actor process means to take care of myself and allow a level of detachment from my experiences so as to enable myself to embody and share them through this role, one whose staged life reflect parts of this history, without attaching any of the negative emotions, internalized racism, and other traumatic memories that go along with confronting these experiences. Yellow Bird, speaking to the benefits of mindfulness in regard to helping dismantle much of the internalized negativity caused by colonialism, says that, “we can become intentionally aware of our experiences, thoughts, and feelings as they unfold in our practice. By being aware of what they are and treating them not as fact but as only experiences, we can change our perceptions, relationship, and response to them and become less reactive and more creative in solving them” (76). This is not to say that I will be completely liberated of the traumas of colonialism by the end of this production, but that I will have spent enough time acknowledging and ruminating over the ways in which colonialism has affected my mind, body, and how I act within these Western structures (including the margins of these pages) in order to safely share those experiences, channeling them through the staged experience of my character of Maybe Jane.

Neurodecolonization, Meditation and Solo Work:

To further understand my practice of mindfulness in regard to my acting challenge it is important to talk about neurodecolonization.

Neurodecolonization concerns the deliberate systematic use of particular exercises and activities that can be used to transform one's mind and brain structures and functions to attain the highest levels of performance and well-being ... positive thinking and concentration exercises; and using visualization or creative imagery and meditation are just a few on a long list of practices that can create positive changes in our brains. Yellow Bird 64.

Yellow Bird puts the act of decolonization into scientific terms. He says that, through the kinds of activities mentioned above, one can actually change the neural pathways away from our *reptilian brain* (the part of our brains associated with negative thought) to access more of our *anterior cingulate* (the part of our brain where compassion, social awareness, and recognizing others emotions live). (60) This, of course, is a bit of an over-simplification. “We believe that creative, healthy, decolonized thinking, actions, and feelings positively shape and empower important neural circuits in our brain, which in turn provide us with the personal resources, strengths, talents, and abilities we need to overcome the oppressions of colonialism” (Yellow Bird 58). How this work of neurodecolonization has manifested for me, and will continue to throughout the rehearsal process, is in the form of meditation and the pursuit of a personal project (a piece that I am currently working on in Professor Erika Batdorf's Solo Creation class here at York), where I have begun to tell the stories of all the memories, experiences, feelings, and personal prejudices that make up my Indigenous identity. While the solo show that I am creating is not directly linked to my work on the *The Yellow Wallpaper* it remains a healthy unearthing and self-diagnostic to those many different aspects of myself and my relationship to my indigeniety. It is the self-awareness, mindfulness, and observance of my actions within this Western institution that I will bring with me into the rehearsal room that will result in a new level of presence, focus, and detail

within the work.

Conflict and Colonialism:

Having said this, I cannot write any further without acknowledging one more facet of colonialism that I must confront when working on this piece. In my research on Charlotte Perkins Gilman, I came across an abundance of material regarding her work and ideologies. The inescapable fact is that I, as an Indigenous performer, am embodying the text (and one could suggest *her own* story) of a woman who did not view a civilized world outside of her white, Euro centric society. “[Scholars] find her almost criminally negligent on issues of class and, most notably, race and ethnicity ... Gilman's feminism was inseparable from racism, and hence all discussion of her neglecting the significance of this crucial dimension will be fundamentally flawed” (Allen 328). Though it can be said that Gilman, despite her acute awareness of the oppression that she experienced at the hands of Euro centric patriarchy, failed to recognize her own complacency within that structure in regards to race, “civilization”, and white supremacy. So, in engaging with this work, I am coloured by this knowledge. It is important for me to recognize this conflict as part of my acting process and mental decolonization. “With colonization, the Europeans brought with them established opinions of cultural, intellectual, and structural supremacy over those encountered in the new land...The European stance was: Indians were savages; women were socially and politically invisible; individualism and patriarchy prevailed” (Voyageur 216). The significance of this within the rehearsal process, or rather, as a prelude to the rehearsal process, is to not allow this fact to hinder my connection to the material at hand. Firstly, however, I must assert my negative feelings; revulsion, frustration, disillusionment, within the space of these pages, to acknowledge, formally, that Indigenous performers (and my other ethnically diverse brothers and sisters) will often be living and breathing text from the canon of oppressive thinkers and that this, obviously or even sub-consciously, affects my connection to the work and, therefore, my ability to be truly authentic and vulnerable within it. Through recognizing the feelings that arise for me when

confronted with this fact, I am able to bring to light my own judgements and, by naming them in this space, allow these feelings to pass through me so I am able to let them go and do my job. For myself there are two layers of judgement that exist: judgement of the work, and judgement of myself for drawing attention to it. The latter is the most problematic for me and my acting challenge for it contains massive amounts of anxiety and fear. I am afraid that I will be judged by my peers, my director, and I fear that I “taint the water” for everyone by bringing this to light. “...negative thoughts can be horrifying beyond all belief. A person can have sustained, intense traumas ...This kind of flawed thinking is regarded as *cognitive bias*, which refers to our patterns of perceptual distortions, inaccurate judgement, and irrationality” (Yellow Bird 59). Yellow Bird, on the subject of mindfulness and neurodecolonization, gives insight into the toxic nature of this kind of negative thinking and how it can be traced back to deep traumas of internal colonization. This is, then, a crucial element to my rehearsal process and in addressing my acting challenge. Yellow Bird goes on to say, “In order to successfully decolonize our harmful, obstructive emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, we must understand this imbalance and have the courage to confront it” (59). This is where I find myself finding the courage to confront these feelings, where they come from, and how to see beyond them as I go into the depths of text exploration, embodying character, and ensemble work. Still, it is a difficult road to finding my truth, as I mentioned before, while fearing negative reception for proclaiming such views, not wanting to alienate myself or feel as if I am looking down on others.

Socialization is the adoption of the behaviour patterns of the surrounding culture. Part of this process is the individual understanding what is acceptable and what is not: in crude but honest terms, what behaviour will get love and what will not ... it is the work of trying to extract our true selves from this web that we are all caught in. To find the beating heart in the Dead indian. Olson 279.

This is what I seek in the rehearsal process and my acting challenge: to work from a true self, a

transparency, in order to allow the stories of others, the story of Maybe Jane, to flow through me uninhibitedly.

Practices, Rituals, Rehearsals:

In *The Decolonization Handbook*, the chapter on Neurodecolonization provides exercises that I will incorporate into my actor's process. This involves the practice of meditation. He gives a 10 step guide to beginning this meditation that is a part of the overall practice of mindfulness that I discuss above. Yellow Bird suggests 10 minutes as a time frame for the meditation. I plan on beginning my rehearsals with this meditation practice. Arriving before our scheduled time, I can prepare for each rehearsal with this meditation and give myself the opportunity to focus my mind and energy on the journey of that evening's rehearsal. After my ten minutes of meditation I give myself a series of stretches (I plan on basing this sequence on the warm up we have been given by our movement teacher this semester, Allyson McMackon) followed by a "river" exploration of any questions, content, and character relating to our work on *Wallpaper*. This river exploration, a Grotowski-based physical improvisation, was also introduced to our class by Ms. McMackon as a tool for physically exploring material. It is a warming up of the body and, most importantly, of the imagination. I have found it to be an excellent container for text work, over the semester we worked with text from *Fern Hill*, a poem by Dylan Thomas. One practice that, beyond rehearsal, I will incorporate into my process is that of a tobacco offering every morning. This is a tradition that I grew up with that, for me, comes from my mother and our Cree family. This is significant for me because it will be a daily opportunity to reflect on my gratitude for the work, health, and another day on the earth. It is also a way to acknowledge my ancestors, thank them, and a reminder to invite them into my process and the rehearsal space. Bringing my ancestors into the space with me every day will support my efforts to decolonize my mind and actor process, empowering my efforts by bringing Indigenous knowledge into the room. Bringing this knowledge into the room is

crucial in meeting my artistic challenge and it is clear that I am not alone in recognizing its importance. “[Visual and Performance Artist, Kent] Monkman, like other Indigenous performance artists, uses Indigenous ways of knowing to create new artistic traditions, particularly in urban settings. These new traditions are integral to the continuing resurgency of Indigenous peoples and cultures in spite of the devastating effects of colonization” (Scudeler 198). I am honoured to have a place in creating these new traditions and am invigorated by my fellow Indigenous artists who are living their practices and creating their new traditions.

Ultimately, what I am hoping to achieve in my performance is authenticity, total vocal and physical presence on stage with no emotion forced, no physical action meaningless or indirect, while maintaining vulnerability; my ability to allow the audience to witness Maybe Jane's emotional life using my true, unearthed, Indigenous experience to colour that emotional life which is driven from my conscious effort to decolonization my mind. “Colonialism built this theatre house on top of a circle. North American society is built upon circles that are present just a few layers below the concrete. My proposal is that we enter the theatre space to find our humanness, not that we blindly seek love by maintaining the status quo. It is important that we challenge the power structures of the proscenium stage” (Olson 281). I cannot pretend that this journey is not fundamentally about challenging this Western institution, York University, academia, and the theatre. In a way, my challenge is to challenge, to silence the cacophony of Western values, institutions, my own learned mind, and attempt to listen to the quiet sound inside of myself. The heartbeat, the drum beat, that ancient rhythm. To rediscover those roots of a sacred plant that have always grown deep inside my gut, touch it, and set it ablaze so that everyone in my ensemble, in my audience, and myself can breath it in.

In this softening and breathing, we expose ourselves to vulnerability. As we dismantle from the inside, we shift our core power. And from this core springs desire, and how we manifest this desire through action shifts space. And this is what extends beyond our bodies into space to hit

the edges of the proscenium stage and confront the colonial gaze. This is how we push through the implicit power structures to assert who we are as the Indigenous body in space. Olson 282.

Kinanaskomintinan.

Rehearsal

Dec 9th, 2016

M talking thoughtful ideas of oppression
INTERNET - who is oppressing me?
Gertrude Stien

AS RELATES
TO MY THESIS

ACTING VS. REACTING

↓
more interesting
thoughts on this later

↓
I guess not

*I seem to be the one who
puts shit back in order

Rehearsal

Dec 8th, 2016

How do I find + keep Cree voice in rehearsal?

Rehearsal

Dec 9th, 2016

Remember that John loves her and isn't just an ass.

Maybe Jane is not "ho hum" or casual about her situation. Not merely a casualty of patriarchy. She is smart and is figuring shit out!!

Rehearsal

Dec 10th, 2016

Last rehearsal before break. I feel that I will have so much to say after we are done for the break. Digestion.

We still have scripts in our hands so I feel, like I do not have a real handle on "what" I am doing. I need to memorize.

My maybe Jane is the mother

That is what I am tossing into the pond today.

Rehearsal

Jan 5th, 2017

Challenges? LINES

Experiments? As a 'school boy' playing in the scene I am a cowboy who is chasing an invisible 'indian' and scalping him

That idea really scares me
it is quite disturbing to me
and it makes the room - nursery instantly super
creepy for me.

It's great

I talked about Stanley Kubrick looking as well
in terms of ~~DETAIL~~ and seemingly

endless meaning he put into his films

(Reference The Shining - Room 237

i watched it

~~for~~ and was

~~inspired~~

inspired

LAYERS of MEANING

I want my Maybe Jene to have that level of detail... (Try to ANYHOW)

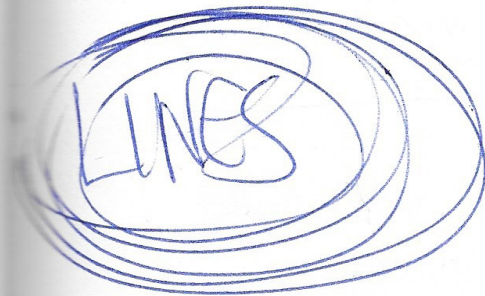


Trying to draw lines parallels

transport memories + realities

EACH CHARACTERS Relationship

to OPPRESSION + POWER



learn them all.

things I am playing with like in the overfeeding scene.

SONGS "SHORT SKIRT, LONG JACKET" CAKE "CRAZY ON YOU" HEART

Rehearsal

Jan 10th,

What is it about that dream scene w/ the "chanting" music?

How do I not "play" insanity? It's too easy. I am fucking WOKE. I can just see, hear, feel in a way others cannot.

I have a lot of time on my hands.

THEORIES: Is it the house?
 Is the woman real? Maybe.
 Is the woman a spirit?
 What happened to the person before me in that room?
 Is she that person?

what happened in that house?
 what are the stories of that house?

TRY: MOMENTS WHERE THE HOUSE SPEAKS TO ME?

Rehearsal Jan 18th, 2017

Challenges - super hard to "work through" very emotional scenes at the end.

challenge of exhausting myself.

really need to make clear for myself what my actions are at the end.

No going through the motions.

Discoveries - I do not laugh until I let go of John and discover all my hard work, my future, my freedom in the Wall paper.

My talking to John at the end, I am trying to tell him how to help me... he does not hear me. It is

To try - still need to find model for my "unhingedness"

"struggling against "showing" insanity or "playing at" being "crazy"

Saturday, January 14th, 2017

(transcribed from an audio recording)

Um, interesting challenge I am having about my character in the latter half of the show and the idea of becoming unhinged...and my fear that I don't want to demonstrate unhingedness...I don't want to condescend the audience by giving them "the crazy lady"...I think it's much more interesting and much more scary if I can almost indoctrinate the audience into what I am seeing and believing. I've been looking at a lot of televangelists and cult people...and they are scary and "crazy" because of how intensely they believe in what they are saying and doing and people, real people, actually believe them and THAT is really scary...that is what I want...and it is an idea that I have to think about, the idea that we are all, the audience, is so much closer to Maybe Jane than they would realize if I just played a "crazy lady" because I think that is much more interesting...because when you see some one in life who is, like, unhinged, like, on the subway you think "oh, isn't that a pity...I hope they get the help they need" and then carry on without giving it any more thought...it is easy to be kind of detached from them...because you can't take the things they say or do seriously...because whatever they do, say, believe isn't real so there is no reason to be unsettled or afraid...whereas I think it is more troubling if...the audience comes along for the ride and only when it is too late do they realize that we've gone off the deep end. All together...I don't know...I just don't want to let them (the audience) off the hook easily...It is like you are being given this first hand account of events and you can be like "it's real, it's real..." like...Scientology, it is like you are loured in, you're loured in...and it's not until you hear the crazy--ass story of the alien overlord Zenu and the alien souls inside of us all making us miserable that you go "Oh! Oh...what have I been doing this whole time?! Oh, this is all a bunch of crap! And this is way, way, way more than I initially signed up for..." But by that point you are already so far in it that it would seem you would be a fool to turn back and admit that you wasted so much for your time...I mean, you are a fool either way, right? So I think that is the angle that I want to try and work from...I want people to believe me, I want to convince them of my authentic experience of this...So that by the time shit really hits the fan and I am talking "all Zenu" that only then people begin to realize...this is fucked, ya know? I mean, what I mean really is that is it easy not to empathize with some one who you cannot trust or take seriously...when some one can say that we clearly don't inhabit the same reality...whereas if I can get them to buy into my reality and THEN they realize that everything is nuts...then I think...that's gold if I can achieve something like that.

Wednesday, January 25th, 2017 OPENING NIGHT (transcribed from an audio recording)

I have never been so nervous in my life I don't think...I can't remember ever feeling so nervous, like, a new kind...I think it is probably because I really care about this show...also holy crap could that wait have been any longer for the house lights to fade...it felt like an eternity. Seriously. I will have to ask what was up with that...Theatre school did not prepare me for that kind of torture...

Also having a full audience to look at really helped me, I felt really supported. I was so happy that Andy and Marlee were sitting right in the front...Andy loves interactive theatre so I knew I was safe to make extended eye contact with him and he wouldn't freak out or be awkward about it...nice to have a friendly face to tell some of my secrets to...what else...it felt really good tonight, I am really happy with it...I am really sad that we only get two more chances to do it...that blows my mind...I love the feeling of running downhill that I get from this show, there is no time to forget or fumble because everything

just flows into the next thing and I feel so in sync with my cast mates that if anyone were to drop the ball we would just be held by our ensemble, you know? Because we all know every element of the show so well...even some lines...It feels like a sports team...like we are one moving entity...super cool and I really just cannot believe we have only two more kicks at this can...super sad...

Saturday, January 28th, 2017 CLOSING NIGHT (transcribed from an audio recording)

Wow...I am really sad it is over. It does not even feel real...I can't believe that I start another show on Tuesday...I wish I could just do this show more...today felt so good. I think it was definitely the best one...and dad was there and he said that he almost cried that I, like, could not handle that it makes me want to cry...Also Sam and Jackie came which made me super excited before the show knowing that there were people I love out there...And it is funny Matthew and Alex were sitting pretty much where Andy and Marlee did so I had more beautiful, loving faces to tell my secrets too...poor strangers last night that had to deal with my intense stare...and there is this one moment in the show right before I go into the room for the last time when it is just me on stage...it is, like, my favourite moment because I really "breathe in" the audience which is cool and new for me and I think I get it...I got struck with real sadness in the show today knowing it was the last time ever that we would get to do it, I think it made me slow things down a little to bask in them just a little bit more...like the dance... I...love that dance. I definitely felt the energy of ONE LAST TIME from the ensemble, like we just let everything go as big as it could like some kind of explosion. I found a certain kind of freedom in that feeling...I really think that I have found what I was seeking in my thesis...free flying emotion...genuine emotion...informed emotion...it feels really good. A small part of me is happy that I will not have to unravel like that anymore...a really interesting part of this has been the self-care, the love that I have had to show myself in order to actually not go crazy in real life or let the things that bring me there keep me down...lots of ABBA...lots of kindness, it is nice to have "a reason" to be so kind to myself...as if I need a reason but it is true, I feel, like, supported by myself which is a new feeling for me and it feels really good. I am also exhausted...I feel heavy...sad...but very proud. Very, very proud of myself and my ensemble...It feels good when you know that you have accomplished something like we did...I am really sad but really happy...and I think that is it...the end.

BECK: And the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror,

BECK, EMMA: Like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase.

BECK: The whole thing goes horizontally, too,

ALL: At least it seems so,

BECK: And I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

OKSANA: They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze,
And that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

ALL: There is one end of the room where it is almost intact,
And there,
When the crosslights fade
And the low sun shines directly upon it,
I can almost fancy radiation after all,—
The interminable grotesques
Seem to form around a common centre
And rush off
In headlong plunges of equal distraction.

BECK: It makes me tired to follow it.

BREFNY: I will take a nap I guess.

INTERLUDE: NAPPING

why.

(MAYBE JANE ASLEEP. **SOUND:** DREAMSCAPE: MAYBE JANE DREAMS SHE IS FLYING AN AIRPLANE — SHE MANEUVERS THE PLANE WILDLY AND SHOOTS DOWN ENEMIES. WALKING ON THE MOON, SHE EXPERIENCES WEIGHTLESSNESS. AROUND A CAMPFIRE WITH BEDOUINS IN THE SAHARA, SHE WITNESSES SECRET CEREMONIES; SHE DANCES IN THE SECOND LINE OF A JAZZ FUNERAL IN NEW ORLEANS; LIPSYNCHING TO OLD DIALOGUE SPOKEN BY BARBARA STANWYCK, SHE STARS IN A HOLLYWOOD FILM. **LIGHTS:** SHIFT.)

*BEDOUINS + SAHARA
= NOT NZ...*

*KUBRICK
MOON
LANDING*

what is going on?

*A moment of character
judgement?
Audience meant to
judge her for seeing them
as "SCARY OTHERS"*

5. MY STRENGTH.

(**SOUND:** PENCIL ON PAPER.)

SIENA: I don't know why I should write this.
I don't want to.
I don't feel able.

(**SOUND:** OUT. DURING THE FOLLOWING, A TABLE IS BROUGHT IN. SIENA, SEATED ON THE SIDE OF THE BED, IS WHEELED UP TO IT. A VERY LARGE MEAL IS BROUGHT IN AND SERVED TO HER WITH SOME URGENCY, COURSE BY COURSE, WITH ACCOMPANYING BEVERAGES. SHE EATS FRANTICALLY, WITH ALL FORCING HER TO EAT MORE AND MORE. **SOUNDSCAPE:** ANNA KOURNIKOVA GRUNTS.)

OPPRESSION + POWER.

force

Conclusion:

In the search of emotional authenticity through the decolonization of my actor process I have come to discover that what I have unearthed is the beginning of a continuous journey rather than the pursuit of a tangible end goal. That is not to say that I found my investigation unsuccessful but have had to abandon the notion of a finite understanding of what I set out to explore through my research. It is as if, through this investigation, I have opened up a new dimension to my process, which only expands the depth and breadth of my questioning. There are no solutions, only new and different challenges. However, more simply, in my attempt to access and radiate deep, unencumbered emotion through my role as Maybe Jane, I would define my experience as a success and therefore have, by my own reckoning, risen to the original acting challenge proposed to me. I have also gained a greater understanding of my methodology, my strengths, and the areas where I seek to improve upon moving forward in my work.

I will begin with the areas in which I was unable to fulfil what I had proposed in my thesis document. I had set out to use a method of physical and text exploration called a “river”, a Grotowski-based exercise, which I had learned in my previous semester at York. I chose this container because of the incredible freedom I found within it and the practical application of using the “river” to investigate text and explore character questions. However, left to my own devices, I was unable to find the ease, flow, and focus I had within the classroom structure. This leads me to a discovery that I made about myself during this journey and that is my struggle to stay consistent without obligation or imposed structure. Another example of this was my journaling. Even though I did manage to journal after every rehearsal (some journals were more comprehensive than others) I know that if I had not been obliged to document my process, I doubt I would have carried out the practice. This is an instance where I find myself requiring the formal, academic frame of the Western academic institution to keep myself consistent or, perhaps, an instance where the obligation of academic accountability goes against what would be my natural instinct as a performer to internally digest the day’s material without scrambling

to write a coherent text that outlined my experiences. That is, to say, that I do not believe my success in performance hinged on my ability to fulfil my academic commitments. I was able, however, to realize the benefit of such a practice. Journaling my rehearsal process allowed me to articulate ideas and questions I may have otherwise merely thought in the moment and not followed through on. The act of writing them down served as a reminder and helped me build upon the previous day's work. Going forward I think that will continue to incorporate a form of journaling into my process because of the discoveries it helped me realize in this piece and thoughts it allowed me to ruminate on and articulate fully which did, ultimately, serve me in performance.

I found great success in incorporating some of my traditional practices into my work such as daily tobacco offerings. It grounded me as a human, as a performer, and in my thesis work. It was also an opportunity to express gratitude and reflect deeply which provided me with a calm spirit and clear mind going into rehearsal every evening. As much success as I found in acknowledging and celebrating my Indigeneity within my process, I was faced with a situation in the rehearsal room where I found myself directly confronted with colonial practice of cultural appropriation. By far the most challenging moment in the piece, for me, was the Maori Haka "inspired" dance during Maybe Jane's dream sequence. A moment where a group of us stomped our feet and slapped our hands on our thighs to a piece of culturally specific music, our movements directly "inspired" by a YouTube video of a traditional Maori Haka dance. Even now, to think about it, I feel heavy and troubled by it. This is because I failed to confront and question it aloud to my director and peers. This leads to one of the most profound discoveries of my journey which is the realization of my own colonial voice and how much hold it has on my work and life. I remember the feeling of my heart sinking as we watched the video being played for us because I knew exactly what was to happen next. Although, our director explicitly said that the intention was not to "copy" or "disrespect" the dance but, rather, it was the essence of the movements that he desired to capture. This left me in a confounded and philosophical

state, where in, I questioned my own instinct and feelings towards the situation before me. Is not even the most benign practice of “borrowing” from another culture and splicing it with other culture’s practices considered cultural appropriation and, therefore, wrong? Yes, I said to myself. But, as I mentioned above, a strong colonial voice began to sound in my mind. It was the voice of fear and the desire to not “rock the boat”. It was the voice that arises when confronted with colonial norms that I am only now beginning to see and understand. It says, “really? You’re making it about *that* again...” Which, upon reflection, seems absurd given the context of the entirety of my thesis work, of course, yes, it *is* about that. I have come to realize, however, that it is easy to extrapolate on the flaws within colonial structures from the safe space in my thoughts onto broad, faceless institutions, but much more terrifying in the practical space of the rehearsal room with the faces of people I respect and admire.

It is here that I enter the new challenge around my work now and moving forward. I am, somewhat reluctantly, thrust into the role of dialogue creator. I do not have the privilege of not concerning myself with acts of colonialism any longer. In order to decolonize my artistic practices as well as my own mind I must begin dismantling the colonial structures I am now beginning to see all around. Dismantle, or perhaps, modify. Inform. In order to do so, however, I must speak up. That is why I mention my reluctance because, in all honesty, it is a terrifying prospect. It will make people, including myself, uncomfortable. There is absolutely no way around that. I see this new challenge as the direct conflict between my Indigenous and Western self. I am doomed to act as a conduit between these two worlds for I inhabit both simultaneously. For, as I mention above, I can no long be complicit in acts of colonialism but struggle to communicate this to those who cannot see or reject its existence. I remind myself that it is not my responsibility to educate everyone. I do believe, though, that it is only through education and dialogue that real change can take place.

The completion of this thesis is the beginning of a journey. It is a journey through deep and muddy waters. And it is the knowledge that I have gained through my time at York and this thesis that provides

me with solid ground from which to launch myself into the murky and uncertain work ahead. Through these two years of internal investigation I finally feel that I have been able to access an uninhibited emotional life on stage. Emotions informed by breath and kinaesthetic awareness. In a sense, I have gotten what I came for. What I did not anticipate was the journey of self-awareness and growth in relationship to my Indigenous identity. I did not arrive expecting to find such an inextricable link from my Indigeneity to my authentic emotional life. In retrospect, it seems obvious, too obvious. So obvious, perhaps, that I took it for granted. I believe I have been gifted an incredible opportunity to contribute to something much larger than my own acting work and process. Of course, that is not to say that this deeply personal work not important to me, but that my personal healing, growth, and discoveries are serving a cause, a collective journey. In the beginning, I do not think I could have even comprehended the empowerment and confidence that this investigation has given me. It also continues to profoundly challenge and frighten me but I am starting to realize that most of the work worth doing runs decidedly, anxiously, and endlessly forward into that fear, those questions, in the ceaseless pursuit of the unknown.

Kinanaskomintinan.

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